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# Tragic Latin Expedition Began With a Letter...

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HUNTSVILLE, Ala., Sept. 5—It apparently began with a letter Tom Posey sent to Honduran Gen. Gustavo Alvarez Martinez last November.

"We got the idea from the newspapers," Posey said. "He was the strongman."

A U.S. Marine veteran who had founded a group called "Civilian-Military Assistance" to help counter communism in Central America, Posey says he addressed the letter

quite simply to "Gen. Martinez, Honduran Government, Honduras, Central America," and mentioned the group's hopes of doing something tangible to stem the tide.

"I was tickled pink when I got [a] letter back," Posey recalled. "It really inspired us. He invited us down. He said he was delighted to hear from people who were interested in doing something."

Their exchange led to a series of expeditions that ended tragically last weekend when two American members of CMA were shot down and killed in a rebel helicopter over Nicaraguan territory.

The Sandinista government of Nicaragua promptly charged that the Americans were "CIA mercenaries." U.S. officials just as promptly denied any connection with CMA, and Posey's group also says it was independent, operating without consorting with any U.S. government agency.

There is, however, evidence that U.S. agencies and officials did have knowledge of the CMA operation, and facilitated it along the way.

Posey had earlier been granted a

license by the Treasury Department as a firearms dealer. He stated on the application, "I plan to buy weapons and ammo to send to El Salvador with that government's permission."

There are also indications that U.S. diplomatic and military personnel in Central America gave various kinds of help to Posey and his followers on their expeditions there.

"It's a lot easier than most people think," said Walton (Cisco) Blanton, another CMA founder and former member of an Alabama National Guard Special Forces unit, referring to the small group's moves to help first the government of El Salvador, then the rebels in Nicaragua over the last year.

"All you've got to do really is reach out . . ."

"And go for it," Posey said, finishing the thought.

The first trip to Honduras, for example, took place last January. Posey said he and three other CMA members went after notifying the Honduran Embassy in Washington of sidearms and rifles they intended to take with them, complete with serial numbers.

"We took weapons with us, yes sir, for our own protection," Posey told reporters here today.

He said they also took about \$4,000 worth of supplies, mostly medical equipment, and flew to Tegucigalpa on a private plane they had chartered.

"We'd just gotten a brand new bunch of uniforms" for the Nicaraguan rebels, Posey added. "We figured we could save \$500—in airline tickets and freight costs—if we were to fly ourselves down there."

Landing in Honduras was no problem.

"When we got to Customs," Posey recalled, "we showed them

the letter from Gen. [Alvarez] Martinez. The guy looked at the letter, closed it up real fast and passed us right through."

The men took a cab to a local hotel, across the street from security police headquarters, and, Posey says, proceeded to the U.S. Embassy first thing the next morning.

"We showed the letter to an American, he had a business suit on," Posey said. "I said, 'Hey, Bud'—I called him 'Bud' because he was younger than me—I said, 'We came here to check in.'"

He said the embassy official made a telephone call and told the group to go back to their hotel.

"We told them what we was wanting: to meet with an official of the Honduran government. I don't know who he called. They said go back to the hotel and they or somebody will contact you."

About three hours later, Posey said, a Honduran official came by. Once again, "we showed him the letter." Alvarez, who was later ousted, was reportedly out of the country at the time, but Posey said the CMA group spoke with an aide to the general and was eventually put in contact with rebel forces of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN).

"We went to a base camp that was told to us was in Honduras," Posey stated. He said they presented their supplies, but declined to say whether they also provided the rebels with basic military training, another service that CMA was set up to provide, on that first

The January trip was CMA's first in support of the Nicaraguan rebels, but not the first south of the border. Posey, Blanton and several others who had "known each other for years" decided in July 1983 to try to do something "as private citizens" and focused first on helping the government in El Salvador.

A produce dealer from Decatur, Ala., Posey said he scraped together some savings and made the trip

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